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Viewing cable 06BEIRUT2539, TFLE01: UN REP SEES CRITICAL WINDOW OF

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06BEIRUT2539	2006-08-05 15:23	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL//NOFORN	Embassy Beirut

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 002539

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/SINGH/HARDING

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/05/2016
TAGS: [KPKO](#) [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [IS](#) [SY](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: TFLE01: UN REP SEES CRITICAL WINDOW OF
OPPORTUNITY FOR LASTING CEASEFIRE

Classified By: Jeffrey D. Feltman, Ambassador. Reason: Section 1.4 (d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) On August 5, A/S Welch and Ambassador Feltman met with the UNSYG's Personal Representative for Lebanon Geir Pedersen and UN Senior Political Affairs Officer Salman Sheikh. Reiterating concerns expressed previously (refs a and b), Pedersen stressed that Israeli military action would not achieve the intended political objectives and that the longer it took to reach a cease-fire, the greater the prospect of a "total collapse" in Lebanon. Pedersen provided a laundry list of "doomsday" scenarios including a Hizballah attack on Tel Aviv, an influx of al-Qaeda-styled militants into Lebanon, and Samir Ja'ja "going mad and declaring his own kingdom." Furthermore, Pedersen feared the "Palestinianization of the conflict" into a West Bank and Gaza-type situation, with Israel unwilling to withdraw unless Hizballah ceased its rocket attacks but with Hizballah unwilling to cease the attacks as long as Israel remained in the South. Turning to the time lag between a possible cease-fire and deployment of an international force to southern Lebanon, Pedersen saw a critical "window of opportunity" for making the deal work during which several pieces would need to come into place: LAF deployment to the South, withdrawal of Hizballah forces north of the Litani, the layering of a more robust international force on top of UNIFIL, and an Israeli withdrawal. During this timeframe, there would have to be guarantees from Israel to cease air raids and from Hizballah to stop firing into Israel.

FOR HIZBALLAH: "MISSION ACCOMPLISHED"

12. (C) Pedersen met with both PM Siniora and Hizballah the previous day (August 4) and touched briefly on both meetings. He described Siniora as "rather emotional," questioning why it was that nobody was pointing fingers at Israel. Hizballah, meanwhile, is "happy" with the current conflict. To their minds, even if hostilities were to stop now, they come out "looking great" in the eyes of their followers. Pedersen believes, though, that Hizballah has an interest in stopping the conflict soon. Hizballah told him that they still support PM Siniora and Speaker Berri and the Lebanese government line in demanding a complete cease-fire and IDF withdrawal. They would support deployment of the LAF to the South, but regarding Hizballah's own withdrawal north of the Litani river, Hizballah believes that this would be a matter for Lebanese Cabinet discussion.

STARK CHOICE FOR ISRAEL: CEASEFIRE OR
"TWENTY MORE YEARS IN LEBANON"

13. (C) Pedersen stressed his belief that Israel will not succeed in destroying Hizballah on the ground nor in stopping the rocket attacks. Thus, in his view, Israel needs to come to a quick accommodation to allow "political factors" to deal with the threat from Hizballah, otherwise Israel risks another protracted conflict in Lebanon. One such political factor would be Lebanese public opinion; Pedersen surmised that once hostilities stop, the non-Shia Lebanese would look back none too fondly on Hizballah's egregious July 12 killing and kidnapping of IDF soldiers which sparked the current hostilities. The significant sectarian counterweight of Sunni, Christian, and Druze displeasure would serve to pressure Hizballah into ceasing such unilateral actions and integrating more fully into the Lebanese body politic. Essentially, Pedersen speculated, the Lebanese would ask the question of Hizballah: "Are you dictated to by Lebanon, or by Iran?" Salman Sheikh added that, "the diversity of Lebanon is a plus here. There are groups here that would not want to

go back to the status quo ante." Pedersen commented that the deployment of the LAF and an international force to the South would serve as an additional political deterrent to Hizballah. Hizballah would not want the public relations disaster of injuring or killing Lebanese soldiers in the South.

GUARANTEES NEEDED FROM BOTH SIDES

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14. (C) As Pedersen envisioned it, there would need to be certain guarantees in the critical timeframe between the declaration of a ceasefire and the deployment of the LAF and an international force to the South. Hizballah would need to cease all attacks on Israel, and also have the firm understanding that Israel would withdraw entirely from the South once the LAF and elements of an international force are in place. Pedersen asked that A/S Welch and Ambassador Feltman stress these points later today in their meeting with Speaker Berri (a Shiite from Tyre and leader of the Amal party, which together with Hizballah forms the Shiite bloc in Parliament). Though Pedersen is not certain that Berri would want to convince Hizballah not to attack "an occupying force," getting Berri to agree to do so would increase pressure on Hizballah to hold its rocket fire while the conditions are put in place for an Israeli withdrawal, and for getting Hizballah to withdraw north of the Litani. Pedersen suggested proposing to Berri that the Israelis will also withdraw from the Sheba'a Farms area: "You will help Berri with Hizballah if you have something on Sheba'a." Pedersen acknowledged that there would be inevitable hostile exchanges between Hizballah militants and the IDF in the South in the interim, but that these could be contained.

15. (C) On the Israeli side of the equation, Pedersen asked for U.S. help in getting the Israelis to guarantee the cessation of aerial attacks against suspected Hizballah positions and leaders. "Be clear with the Israelis: if there are no Hizballah rocket attacks, Israel should not conduct aerial attacks." In this context, Pedersen suggested altering the language in operative paragraph 1 of the UN draft resolution from "cessation of offensive military operations" to read only "cessation of hostilities." While allowing that Israel has the right to self-defense, Pedersen felt that the current language left too much room for interpretation and would allow Israel a backdoor to continuing its aerial bombardments of Lebanon.

16. (C) Pedersen accepted that the LAF and a beefed-up international force in the South would not be a significant military deterrent to Hizballah if they opted in the future to lob rockets at Israel or return south of the Litani, but neither would sustained Israeli military action ever end the Hizballah threat. Israel would need to be reassured that the political and diplomatic pressure from inside and outside Lebanon will serve to more effectively hamstring Hizballah in the short term and ultimately allow for the disarmament of Hizballah according to UN resolution 1559.

17. (C) A/S Welch suggested that, as an added confidence builder for Israel, UNIFIL should ensure against the resupplying of Hizballah by stationing observers at the nine entry points along the Lebanese/Syrian border. Pedersen thought this was a good idea in principle, but that it might lead the Syrians -- whom Pedersen said are being "unhelpful" -- to scupper the ceasefire/force deployment deal.

18. (U) A/S Welch has cleared this message.
FELTMAN